

Chapter 1 - Purpose, Need, and Significant Issues

The Purpose of and Need for Action

The purpose of this proposed action is to develop a Routt National Forest Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (Revised Plan) which will guide all natural resource management activities on the Routt National Forest (Forest) and meet the objectives of federal law, regulations, and policy. The current Routt National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (1983 Plan) was approved on November 15, 1983. As of September 1, 1995, the 1983 Plan has been amended 11 times. A Revised Plan and development of the associated Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) are needed to satisfy regulatory requirements and address new and changing information about the Forest and its uses.

Need to Change and Rationale

Regulations implementing the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) require the Regional Forester to make revisions to forest plans and provide the basis for any revision. The following section describes the need to change the 1983 Plan and presents the basis for proposed changes within the context of regulatory requirements.

In 1982, instructions to revise forest plans and the basis for revision were formulated in the Code of Federal Regulations at 36 CFR 219. The regulations are currently being revised but will not be finalized before the issuance of this Revised Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). The Revised Plan will therefore be subject to direction provided by the 1982 regulations. Specific instructions to revise forest plans found at 36 CFR 219.10g state:

"A forest plan shall ordinarily be revised on a 10-year cycle or at least every 15 years. It also may be revised whenever the Forest Supervisor determines that conditions or demands in the area covered by the plan have changed significantly or when changes in RPA policies, goals, or objectives would have a significant effect on forest level programs. In the monitoring and evaluation process, the interdisciplinary team may recommend a revision of the forest plan at any time. Revisions are not effective until considered and approved in accordance with the requirements for the development and approval of a forest plan. The Forest Supervisor shall review the conditions on the land covered by the plan at least every 5 years to determine whether conditions or demands of the public have changed significantly."

After study and consultation with the public, the Forest Supervisor determined that significant changes have taken place since the 1983 Plan went into effect.

Possible changes to the 1983 Plan were tentatively identified by the Forest Supervisor in the Routt National Forest Monitoring and Evaluation Report 1984 -1991, published in January 1992. A forest interdisciplinary team reviewed forest lands, resources, and their uses. The team considered environmental conditions, historical use and occupation, and past and current data inventories. Forest staff communicated with the public regarding the management and condition of Forest lands and resources. Public response led to the identification of preliminary public issues.

The Forest Supervisor and Regional Forester further clarified possible changes in the Purpose and Need/Planning Criteria (PNPC), published in September 1992, and the Analysis of the

Management Situation (AMS), published in June 1993. The identified changes included ecosystem management, roadless acres, timber suitability and allowable sale quantity, travel management, wild and scenic rivers, etc. The PNPC and AMS documents helped the interdisciplinary team catalog new information and strategies to better manage forest land and resources. The team identified the following reasons for revising the 1983 Plan:

1. Improved information about forest land and resources.
2. Improved and/or altered scientific knowledge and application.
3. Changing professional and public concern for social, economic, and environmental issues.
4. Existing laws, newly created and/or changed laws, and policies.

Inventory information concerning the Forest's land and water resources is more accurate than it was 10 years ago. The Forest now has a Geographic Information System (GIS) which greatly enhanced the plan revision analyses. The resource data base, the Rocky Mountain Resource Information System (RMRIS) has been in use for the past 10 years and is constantly improving as more field data is collected. The Forest also has a complete Forest soil survey and a riparian inventory. The interdisciplinary team used GIS to assess wildlife habitat and biological diversity, develop the roadless inventory, and evaluate tentatively suitable timber lands.

Increased knowledge of the physical, biological, and social processes occurring on the Forest has improved during the past decade. New or emerging knowledge and application in the areas of biological diversity, social, and recreational trends make revision a timely matter.

There is more public involvement in forest management issues now than in 1983. People have expressed dissatisfaction with the amount of timber harvested, the available recreation opportunities, changes in wildlife habitat, forest access, and a host of other issues covered by forest plan direction. The Forest Service and the public have recognized the need for an updated forest plan.

Finally, newly created or changed laws and policies affect forest plan content and forest management. Examples include the Oil and Gas Leasing Reform Act of 1987, the 1987 Clean Water Act, the Clean Air Amendments of 1990, and the 1993 Colorado Wilderness Bill.

After examining the 1983 Plan, the Forest Supervisor concluded that many of the existing forest-wide goals, objectives, standards, guidelines, and management area prescriptions need to be considered for change. A Notice of Intent to revise the 1983 Plan was published in the Federal Register on July 14, 1993.

The Revision Topics

Revision topics are subjects where resource conditions, technical knowledge, or public perception of resource management have created a potential "need for change." Simply stated, revision topics can be thought of as umbrellas which cover one or more significant issues identified on the Forest. Resolution of these topics individually would generally result in a significant amendment to a forest plan for the following reasons:

1. Changes in resource management could result in significant changes in the mix of goods and services the Forest is producing.
2. Changes in resource management could indicate that the existing forest plan direction needs change over large areas of the Forest.

3. Intense concern by the public or the Forest Service may cause significant changes.

The Purpose and Need/Planning Criteria document identified five revision topics listed below. These topics were identified because they meet one or more of the criteria listed above.

Biological Diversity

Roadless Areas/Wilderness

Timber Suitability/Allowable Sale Quantity (ASQ)

Recreation/Travel Management

Wild and Scenic Rivers

Other topics or resources that did not meet the above criteria were analyzed for change through adjustment of standards and guidelines, management area prescriptions, or procedure; they appear in the Revised Plan.

Each revision topic has environmental, social, and economic implications. Environmental implications relate to the fundamental integrity of the physical and biological aspects of the Routt National Forest environment and the surrounding area. Social implications relate to the people who use the Forest or who are directly affected by forest management. Economic implications relate to the people, businesses, and governmental agencies that rely on the Forest for income or livelihood.

In each alternative, these topics are addressed in the context of ecosystem management. Ecosystem management is the tool the Routt National Forest will use to address and integrate the environmental, social, and economic implications of these topics. The revision topics; their associated environmental, social, and economic implications; and the key indicators (measures) of how each topic will be addressed are described below.

Biological Diversity

Biological diversity is the full variety of life in an area. This includes the ecosystems, plant and animal communities, species and genes, and the processes through which individual organisms interact with one another and their environments (USDA Forest Service 1992a). Biological diversity at larger geographic scales, such as watersheds, landscapes and beyond, includes the diversity of human cultures and life-styles (Salwasser et al. 1993). Biological diversity occurs at many different levels, ranging from the molecular scale to complete ecosystems.

Biological diversity refers to the relative frequency and number of biological entities at a given scale. It is estimated that there may be as many as 530 million plant and animal species on earth, of which only 1.4 million are documented (Wilson 1988). From a total species inventory basis, it is evident that biological diversity is complex. Because of this complexity, there is no widespread agreement on how to measure biological diversity or how best to perpetuate it. Agreement does exist on the concept that reducing the number of species in a system also reduces biological diversity (Langner and Flather 1994). Whether this is positive or negative depends on individual human values.

The Forest Service recognizes new concerns regarding late successional forests, sensitive species, and biological diversity. These concerns, in addition to new ecosystem management policies, need to be incorporated into the Revised Plan.

The Routt National Forest has adopted a three-part approach to the analysis of biological diversity. The approach is discussed in detail in Appendix D. The first part, Range of Natural Variability, addresses the Forest's past conditions and historical development. This information aids in understanding the current Forest and the processes associated with its development. The remaining two parts are the coarse filter and fine filter. The coarse filter focuses on the function, composition, and structure of ecosystems. Most species needs are addressed in the coarse filter. However, a few species may require special attention due to unique habitat requirements or lack of species numbers in an area. These sensitive species needs will be addressed in the fine filter. The more restrictive habitat needs of these fine filter species will serve as an indicator of overall biodiversity for the Forest. Accordingly, this fine filter analysis will provide the focus for environmental effects to biological diversity analyzed in Chapter 3 of this report.

The key indicators or measures to be analyzed under this revision topic are:

- Effects of the alternatives on habitat composition, structure, function, and distribution for threatened, endangered, and sensitive species.
- Identification and disclosure of protective measures (such as standards and guidelines) designed to avoid further listing of federal sensitive species.
- Analysis to determine that viable populations of threatened, endangered, and sensitive species would remain well distributed over the Forest.

The environmental implications involve the impact of Forest management, or the lack of it, on the biological diversity of the Forest, which in turn may affect the health of the ecosystem and the organisms living there. The focus on maintaining biological diversity across the Forest is in response to growing concerns about late successional forests; riparian areas; and threatened, endangered, and sensitive species.

The social and economic implications relate to how maintaining biological diversity may affect human use of the Forest. These uses would include accessibility of the Forest for various uses and production of traditional forest products.

Roadless Areas/Wilderness

The forest re-inventoried and evaluated roadless areas to determine if they qualified as wilderness. The Forest Supervisor identified fifteen areas that were capable of and available for wilderness recommendation. As a result of this analysis, the Regional Forester will decide if any roadless areas are to be recommended for wilderness designation and how other roadless areas are to be managed.

Roadless areas and their potential allocation to different land management strategies have been a concern of the public since the 1983 Plan was approved. The key indicators to be analyzed under this revision topic are:

- Acres designated as capable and available for wilderness management.
- Areas recommended for wilderness designation.
- Acres that will be managed using unroaded management area prescriptions.
- Acres of roadless inventory that will be allocated to roaded management area prescriptions.

There are environmental implications in allocating lands to roadless areas or designated wilderness.

The social and economic implications involve recreation, travel, and timber harvest levels. Roadless areas offer excellent opportunities for primitive, semi-primitive, and nonmotorized recreation. Building roads into these areas and allowing existing undeveloped roads to be used would increase motorized recreation opportunities and increase the land available for timber harvest.

Timber Suitability/Allowable Sale Quantity (ASQ)

The amount of land that is suitable and made available for timber harvest on the Routt National Forest will depend, in part, upon the future management of roadless areas. The Allowable Sale Quantity (ASQ) is the maximum timber harvest level allowed in a decade. This topic is included in the revision because of regulatory requirements and the high level of public interest.

Improved inventories and revised timber yield estimates show that assumptions about timber harvest levels in the 1983 Plan were inaccurate (see Appendix B). The key indicators for this revision topic are:

- Acres designated as suitable for timber production.
- Location of acres designated as suitable for timber harvest.
- Level of timber harvested (ASQ).

The environmental implications involve biological diversity and roadless areas. Since timber harvest is a primary tool for modifying vegetation, it can have effects on wildlife and plant habitats, soil, and water.

The economic implications relate to the direct and indirect effects timber harvest has on jobs, personal income, and revenues to local communities. More than one-third of the local timber industry demand for sawtimber comes from the Routt National Forest. As a result, those who work in the timber industry are concerned about this Revised Plan. The same is true for other businesses and local governments affected by local sawmills and their outputs. Additional economic implications include the financial and economic efficiencies of the timber harvest programs on the Forest. Social implications of timber harvest include effects on recreation opportunities and visual quality.

Recreation/Travel Management

The 1983 Plan emphasizes primitive and semi-primitive recreation opportunities on 70% of the Forest. Population increases and improved technology have resulted in a dramatic escalation in year-round recreation use and increased conflicts between motorized and nonmotorized recreationists.

Off-highway-vehicle (OHV) use has risen steadily during the last two decades. Increased mobilization has created new opportunities for the public, as well as new conflicts, typically between motorized and nonmotorized users.

Nonmotorized use continues to expand as the population increases and equipment improves. Horseback and foot travel have traditionally been used to access the Forest and have become primary forms of recreation. More recently, mountain bikes have become a popular recreation use. Bicycles allow access into remote areas that were formerly accessible only to hikers.

The key indicators for this revision topic are:

- Acres of Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) classes.
- Developed recreation capacities.
- Acres of the Forest allocated to motorized and nonmotorized use.

The environmental implications include the impacts to wildlife species from different levels of human use and the effects of road and trail erosion on soils and water quality.

The social implications relate to motorized use versus nonmotorized use. Many recreationists utilize roads to access different parts of the Forest. In the last decade, areas have been closed or restricted to motorized use to achieve other multiple-use objectives, such as protecting soil resources or providing for wildlife seclusion during critical birthing and nesting seasons. Closing areas to motorized use affects traditional access patterns for recreation, hunting, and firewood gathering. Economic implications include the effects on levels and types of recreation opportunities, as well as on jobs and incomes of local communities. Economic efficiency of the Forest recreation program is also an important factor.

Wild and Scenic Rivers

The 1975 amendment to the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act designated the Elk and Encampment Rivers on the Routt National Forest for study and potential addition to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. Both were studied in separate environmental impact statements in 1979. President Carter recommended that the Encampment River, south of the Wyoming-Colorado state line, and the Elk River, except for the lower 6 miles, be included in the Wild and Scenic Rivers System. Congress has not yet taken action on this recommendation. The 1983 Plan directs that both rivers be protected from activities (i.e., timber harvest and road construction) that could diminish their eligibility for designation.

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act calls for the evaluation of other streams during forest planning efforts. Through this analysis, potential eligibility of other streams has been determined (see Appendix E). The Revised Plan will provide interim protection until a suitability study of each stream is conducted.

The key indicators for this revision topic are:

- Miles of eligible rivers.
- Location of eligible rivers.

The environmental, social, and economic implications of this revision topic are minimal due to the small acreages allocated to potentially eligible wild and scenic rivers. Allocations are based on the rivers being potentially eligible and available for inclusion to the Wild and Scenic River System.

The Proposed Action

The Forest Service proposes to revise the 1983 Plan to address the issues, concerns, and judicial, legal, and regulatory requirements described above.

Decisions Made in Forest Plans

The key decisions made in a forest plan for long-term management of national forests are:

1. Establishment of forest-wide multiple-use goals and objectives, 36 CFR 219.11(b);
2. Establishment of forest-wide management requirements (Forest-wide Standards and Guidelines), 36 CFR 219.13 to 219.27);
3. Establishment of management area direction (Management Area Prescriptions and associated Standards and Guidelines for 19 management areas), 36 CFR 219.11(c);
4. Designation of suitable timberland and establishment of allowable sale quantity (ASQ). Designation of lands suitable for grazing and browsing. Identification of lands suitable and available for oil and gas leasing. Provision for a broad spectrum of forest and outdoor recreation opportunities. 36 CFR 219.14, 219.15, 219.16, 219.20, and 219.21;
5. Establishment of requirements for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the Revised Plan to meet the requirements of 36 CFR 219.11(d);
6. Documentation that we will/will not recommend any further additions to the wilderness preservation system.

Significant Issues

The five revision topics represent the major issues addressed in this document. Significant issues are issues the Forest Supervisor and Staff have determined to be significant matters of the proposed action and key elements in alternative formulation.

The focus of the Revised Plan is on multiple-use objectives. Each alternative emphasizes specific land and resource uses and de-emphasizes other uses in response to the revision topics/issues. This approach results in trade-offs between the alternatives.

Issues and Topics Raised but not Addressed

A number of issues identified by the public and other agencies are not addressed in the alternatives described in this document. They are described in the Purpose and Need/Planning Criteria document. There are several reasons why some issues were not addressed further.

The topic or issue may have required a solution that is outside the scope of the decisions made in a forest plan. The scope of decisions made in a forest plan includes:

- forest-wide goals and objectives;
- standards and guidelines;
- management area prescriptions;
- the designation of land suitable for timber production;

- monitoring requirements;
- wilderness, wild and scenic river, and research natural area recommendations.

If the issue is not best resolved as one of those decisions, it needs to be addressed in another process. This may include changes in national or regional policy, changes in the law, or decisions made by other agencies.

Other issues were not considered further because the 1983 Plan adequately addresses them. Direction that applies to issues adequately covered in the 1983 Plan will be carried forward into the Revised Plan. In other cases, there is no new information to suggest that the analysis leading to the 1983 Plan is obsolete. Because this is the revision of a forest plan, it focuses on those elements of the 1983 Plan that require change.

The Planning, Environmental Analysis, and Decision Process

The forest plan revision process has a number of steps that must be completed in a logical order. Public involvement is ongoing throughout the process. Copies of the Purpose and Need/ Planning Criteria, Analysis of the Management Situation, Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statements, and other information about specific analysis can be obtained at 2468 Jackson Street, Laramie, WY 82070-6535. The 1983 Plan is being revised using guidance in the 1992 Rocky Mountain Regional Guide available from the Regional Office, P.O. Box 25127, Lakewood, CO 80225.

B

Biological diversity 1-4

N

Need to change 1-1

P

Purpose of and need for action 1-1

R

Revision topic 1-2

Roadless area 1-5

S

Sensitive species 1-5

T

Travel management 1-7

W

Wild and scenic rivers 1-8

Wilderness 1-5

Chapter 1 - Purpose, Need, and Significant Issues	1-1
The Purpose of and Need for Action	1-1
Need to Change and Rationale	1-1
The Revision Topics	1-2
The Proposed Action	1-9
Decisions Made in Forest Plans	1-9
Significant Issues	1-9
Issues and Topics Raised but not Addressed	1-9
The Planning, Environmental Analysis, and Decision Process	1-10